

# After the Blood Dries

Casualty and Creation

Rune Weaver

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This book is memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Names have been removed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

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# About the Author

Rune Weaver is an author, poet, avid reader, and musician. In 2017, Rune received a BA in English with a focus on Creative Writing from the University of South Florida in Tampa Bay where he was born and raised. Rune's works frequently focus on LGBTQ+ issues, recovering from abuse, and self-discovery.

In his free time, Rune likes to play the piano and the cello, ride motorcycles, travel, read a variety of novels, and spend time with his family of choice and their dog, Ghost.

# Preface

This collection of poems will focus mainly on my own personal experiences. The majority of this content includes heavy topics: abuse, strained family relationships, self-harm, an eating disorder, coming out, and transitioning. I write about things that happen to me and around me and my own reactions to those situations; I speak only for myself and for no group or community as a whole.

Writing has been a therapeutic outlet for me for quite some time, and these works reflect that. These are not happy poems. Many of them are hurt and angry and filled with frustration; they are also painfully honest.

I was raised by highly conservative, Evangelical parents, who believe that being queer is both a choice and a terrible sin against God. Until the end of fourth grade, I attended a very small, Christian, private school. From fifth grade on, I was homeschooled. While I greatly appreciated my parents' decision on that matter from an academic standpoint, this greatly impacted my social circle, which mainly consisted of the people at my parents' church. Because of this, much of the exposure that many children receive to LGBTQI+ people and issues at school or other extracurricular activities, I did not experience until much later.

As a young person, I was both homophobic and transphobic, and — speaking as someone who is both bisexual and transgender — I internalized both of these terrible and unjust viewpoints. This fairly severe cognitive dissonance led to other mental health issues, including severe depression. It took years of researching, reading, and self-discovery before I was truly able to put those opinions behind me and accept myself as I am.

While most are familiar with the concept of physically abusive parents, mental and emotional abuse is something that many people are not able to recognise easily; some do not even think it is real. My mother is a narcissistic parent and, though my father was not abusive, he never stopped her either. I am my mother's least favorite child; this is something that has been apparent from a young age, though I personally did not start putting the pieces together in the correct order until the summer after 7th grade. During that summer, I realized that it didn't matter what I did, I would not be treated like her other children; before that I believed that there was something deficient in me and, if I could just be better, she would love me more.

These poems were written over the course of the last three years. As such, I have changed and grown as a person from one poem to the next, though these are not in the order in which they were written, but rather a semi-chronological list of events. I have left the poems as they were at the time of creation. I write to help myself process and it was important to me that the situations and emotions imbedded for myself not be adjusted due to public perusal.

While the creation of these pieces of poetry have been primarily for my own benefit, I have decided to put them out into the public arena for two main reasons. If you, reader, have ever had to go through any of these adversities or are going through them right now, it is my sincere hope that these poems remind you that you are not alone. There are others who understand and want to help you. You deserve to be treated with respect and kindness.

But these poems don't talk about respect and kindness; they talk about disgust and shame and utter loathing for my own innermost self. And that's okay. Those emotions are real and human and part of me, and they need to be acknowledged so they can be laid to rest.

The other reason is for those of you who do not have personal experience in these areas. You weren't raised in an abusive home. You never felt the need to harm yourself. Eating was a pleasurable opportunity for you. You aren't transgender; maybe you've never knowingly met a transgender person in your entire life. It is my desire that at least a few of these pieces will help you understand, on a more intimate level, what it feels like and to help you be able to put yourself in someone else's shoes for just a few moments.

If even one person feels like they have a better understanding of any of these experiences or if you can relate to this personally and have felt comforted, then I will have succeeded in my goal for this book.

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# Introduction

To a disdainful mother:

voices whirl in the quiet —  
a mother's disapproval,  
stony and dangerous,  
shatters the stillness.

needle-thin accusations  
meet timid, kitten-licks of acceptance,  
sticking something fragile  
full of holes.

what does not fit  
in her little boxes  
must be harshly dismantled.



To an unaccepting father:

low words sizzle in the garage —  
a father's disappointment,  
blunt and straightforward,  
fractures the glass peace.

hammer-heavy grievances  
batter against dragon-scale assurance,  
attempting to shatter  
something tempered into shards.

what falls outside  
his orthodox code  
must be impaired beyond use.

Dragonborn: to my sister, regarding our childhood house

She asks *are you coming home tomorrow?*

I stifle the fire on my breath before my lungs expand, tell her yes.  
Rancid words rot on my tongue like meat left too long in the sun,  
trapped behind a placid, hide-your-teeth grin.

Memories of suffocating walls coated in  
god and rubies strangle  
the desire to snarl at her  
*that is not my home!*

The shattered muzzle hangs  
on my wall; rough lips sneer.  
Ridged tail whips out to the left, compensating  
for my agitation.

Talons click against the ground, dark  
and capable, but the granite  
floors of that house are tractionless  
and blunting.

The soft skin of a fledgling has dried out,  
become pearlescent cuirass,  
no longer vulnerable  
to attacks, but

lithe muscles don't do much  
against poison and the water in  
that house is all laced  
with belladonna.

Leathery wings have sprouted, hollow  
bones jutting above sharp shoulder blades now  
long and unyielding in the absence  
of thick metal files, shaving away fragile growth as it appears.

The mirror shows teeth honed to a glittering point,  
neck proud and arched,  
scales burning opal,

eyes unstable and merciless

as the sea. Slithering, shimmering heat  
coils in my stomach.

But that house has nets hanging from the ceiling, ready  
to ensnare. I wait for them to drop

down, so they can pull out my teeth  
by the root, a tale for other parents to tell  
their dragonborn children. Talons ground  
into powder, added to a tonic to prevent the Shift

in younglings. Hollow bones broken, hide tanned  
away, so there is no escape.

Scales pried out, sold  
as pendants and jewelry. Tail docked

at the first vertebra,  
*you can't even walk right.*  
Family that smiles,  
*you look more human now,*

as I drip blood onto the carpet of my childhood bedroom.  
And my sister asks me *are you coming home tomorrow?*  
like aqua regia in the back of my mouth, and she holds  
my jaw shut until, swallowing, I answer yes.

Damaged

## Refill My Cup

Blue, tulip cup hangs  
empty  
from french-tipped fingers.

Expectant, she smiles, creases  
carved around her lips,  
around her eyes.

Grab the mug with thick fingers  
as you patter out  
of the room.

Caffeine addict,  
in need of a fix.  
Twist the cap like

pulling out a wine stopper.  
Carbonation hisses,  
her liquorless booze.

Neon green  
*glug glug glugs*  
into delft blue.

This is how your world works:  
she drains the glass;  
you refill it.

Present her goblet,  
hand out-stretched,  
a servant before  
the queen  
on her pillow throne.  
She takes a sip.

## Puppy Dog Eyes

*If I see your eyes without your mouth, I can't tell if you're smiling or frowning, happy or sad. — Mother's best friend*

*You have puppy dog eyes.*  
Chewed-down child fingers  
hoard maybe-praise  
like flawless jade.

It's a gem, tucked under your ribs  
by your spine.  
She says it with a soft tongue.  
You are not insulted.

Dogs rub against dirty hands  
and soft-haired calves,  
read easily as books,  
their truth displayed in every muscle.

Frequently there's a cork  
in your throat, and the words get  
stuck in your chest, in your head.  
Dogs don't need speech to understand.

Your hands are twice as large now,  
nails grown and groomed,  
words handled and weighed,  
forced around the barricade in your trachea.

Her riddle unravels,  
thorny underneath the petals,  
as you grasp the stem  
of what she meant:

*Your eyes are hollow.*

## Crucified

Beech beams run the length  
of your shoulder blades,  
down your spine,  
a self-made cross  
holding you steady.

Methane pours  
out of her throat.

Spikes skewer through the meat  
of your foot into the carpet.  
Clamped molars hiding all  
timbre and tone  
behind your off-white teeth.

Gaze locked just passed her  
left ear with gauze packed  
at the top of your throat.

Her neck stretches down  
to force your eyes to her,  
jagged flint tumbles  
out of her mouth.

Your ear canal is clear,  
running straight to your brain.

She won't let you climb down  
yet. Splinters burrow into your  
back as you breathe through  
your abdomen.

Here you will hang  
until she can catch glistening  
rain trickling out of the ocean  
down your wind-beaten face.

## Puke Plate

At twelve, your mother makes  
you eat your own vomit.

When shuddering sobs force  
your stomach to reject your hard-won victory,

she commands you to  
pick up your gold-trimmed fork,

clean your acidic sick off  
her apple and pear dinnerware.

She finds it funny,  
a chunky, green medal to clip on her purse.

At twenty-one, you ask for an apology.  
She laughs.

*That's never going to happen.*  
You demand acknowledgment,

condemn it as wrong.  
*No, it's parenting.*

The lights flicker.  
She proclaims them steady

with napalm in her throat  
while her fingers wiggle the switch.

Your final word to her  
is empty as your scraped-clean plate:

*Goodbye.*



## Cello

Manicured fingers clutch  
at my wooden neck. A palm  
fists around the base of my bow, controlling  
my ability to communicate with heavy,  
awkward movements. White-fringed

nails put pressure on  
the wrong spots of my strings;  
the notes come out  
awry: too sharp,  
falling flat, a different tone

all together. I screech  
as she shifts into fourth  
position, stuttering on the upbow.  
Gasping, echoing  
up a siren's wail.

She twists my pegs,  
trying to tune me to her  
preference. She turns the enameled pins  
until my C string snaps. Lacquered  
nails rest smugly on my fingerboard.

Horsehair rests once more on  
the remaining metal. The song is  
awful,  
a corruption,  
but more to her liking.

Flesh striped purple, green, pink, blue.

*Don't touch me. You're stained.*

*If we just peel your skin off, you won't be painted anymore.*

But then I won't have skin at all.

*Don't touch me. You're stained.*

*Better no skin than dyed skin.*

*If we just peel your skin off, you won't be painted anymore.*

I think it's pretty. *It isn't.*

*Better no skin than dyed skin.*

Glance down at a vibrant complexion. Take two steps back.

I think it's pretty. *It isn't.*

A knife pressed into a bright blue palm.

Glance down at a vibrant complexion, take two. Step back.

But then I won't have skin at all.

A knife pressed into a blood-bright palm.

Flesh stripped: purple, green, pink, blue.

—But The Muscle Is That Color Too

reconstruction

quartz table,  
iron-will restraints,  
statement-sharpened scalpels.  
intestines, lungs on display,  
removed, remade,  
sensations bright, undeadened.

you are in pieces,  
    broken  
apart for indifferent remodel.  
they desire to mold your will to theirs:  
a marionette,  
dancing under their guiding hands.

they want you docile,  
    crippled,  
contradicting your own mind.  
they attempt to erase you,  
shove something else in.  
they are succeeding.

## Depression

Icy water surges  
through your long-healed gills.  
You took a harpoon,  
cut in between ribs  
to make them.  
They work, but not well.  
Enough to keep you from drowning.

*Shunk, shunk,*  
on the lakebed,  
boulders tied to corpse-gaunt ankles.  
Thin slush fights you.  
Thighs straining forward.  
Abdomen flexing for balance  
against the flow.

Crystal clear and freezing  
down your nose,  
breathing is  
exhausting,  
demanding  
your attention like  
a screaming child.

Fluid crushing skull,  
crisp, startling.  
It muddies your  
thoughts, slows  
blood in capillaries,  
prevents neurons  
from firing.

Sunshine cuts  
through the surface,  
but you are too deep down.  
The world is  
gray and  
washed-out

before you.

The current whispers  
frigid apathy  
in blue ears,  
carries all  
other  
sounds  
away.

## Nail Beds

Four days without food.  
You're still not hungry, but  
you choke some nutrients down.  
You know how growing things work.

Yet almanac knowledge doesn't  
seed or weed or water.  
Nourishment is dead leaves  
on your tongue.

A sun-golden face lays down  
on your well-deep abdomen.  
A wheat-head could connect her  
skyward ear to your valley sternum.

Rib cage as bone-dry furrows in  
a fallow field, empty season after season.  
The withering stalk of your neck strains  
to support your sunflower skull.

Red oak hands weigh down pine wrists.  
Your nail beds are lavender enough that  
your fingers are perennially painted:  
leaf green, river blue, rain gray, fertilizer black.

Cotton white spots on keratin.  
You can slip under,  
peel your nail apart,  
separating like an onion skin.

## Permanent Marker

The pen is sharper than the blade.  
Large-knuckled hands reach  
for markers — not knives —  
to etch your private grief  
into your flesh.

Inky lines bleed over  
every empty inch of thigh,  
crawl at awkward  
angles over kneecaps,  
swoop the graceful curve of calf.

Creamy skin too beautiful.  
It curdles your stomach,  
hammers glass to dust  
behind your eyes.  
Mark it up. Make it match your insides.

Throat blocked off, but hands are  
busy. Temporary tattoos creep  
over hip bones, stomach,  
chest, breasts, shoulders,  
elbows — stop!

The words are ugly,  
like you.  
Stunning  
in their raw-throated rage,  
their shredded-muscle misery.

Mirrors show your brain on your body,  
finally, with every blackened word.  
Your girl-perfect lips relax a little  
before you hide yourself  
under figure-hugging clothing.

Flawed



## Ash Arteries, Charcoal Bones

A girl with ash in her arteries  
and soot irises  
is a boy  
with smoke in his lungs  
and charcoal bones

People feel the heat  
from the firebrand tongue-  
ember heart,  
think that the soot girl-  
charcoal boy  
must be on fire

Some throw water sneers  
and dirt scorn  
on culm neurons  
and scoria blood  
in hopes that it will  
quench the flames

Others in their fervor  
increase the temperature  
until the anthracite intestines  
and graphite mind  
melt into the air  
as if they never existed

Fewer still place an oxygen mask  
over a stone nose,  
hoping to rescue the flicker-fire soul  
from the gasoline-soaked pyre,  
not knowing the alveoli still  
need carbon monoxide to  
expand

All that is left  
are the smoldering remnants:

cinder sweat  
cauterized fingertips  
branded hipbones  
blistered larynx  
singed synapses

The ash girl-smoke boy  
is chafed  
festering  
suffocating  
while the crowd exclaims  
*We saved you!*

10 Rules

For Fitting

(In)Correctly

In Your Own Skin

*.I. Start young; you are old enough to know what is expected of you.*

You are two;  
you love learning and being read to and performing  
perfectly in front of an audience. You watch and listen and practice  
over and over in your bedroom until you are satisfied  
and, when you show them, their chests puff out with pride.  
You love investigating, putting information together,  
like dozens of little puzzles. You are good at puzzles.  
You ask questions and remember which ones make them look at you  
like you made a mistake. You hate, hate, hate making mistakes.

You are three;  
you can, without help, read children's Bible stories and the faces  
of adults around you. You speak and act and swear exactly once  
and note on a growing list in your head what made them tell you *no*,  
which ones made them curl their lips and set their eyebrows  
like you are wrong. You hate, hate, hate being wrong.

(You don't know it yet,  
but you will spend the first two decades of your life  
working hard to stop being wrong.  
But you can't;  
it's in your bones somewhere.)

*.II. You're smart; don't let on that you don't understand.*

You're clever; you know it; you can't escape it; they won't let you.

It's okay though. Your brains are the one thing you take pride in.

You observe, dissect, evaluate, regurgitate correctly;

it is your saving grace.

You are in first-grade and testing at secondary school levels;

they grin at you, answer the questions you ask.

There are some topics you know better than to bring up now;

they don't notice your face is turning purple in effort to stay silent.

You take advantage of that;

you don't want them to know how much you rely on your brain

to make up for your other shortcomings.

Shortcomings are not acceptable.

You compensate. You rationalize that it balances out in the end,

so long as you can fake it well enough.

*.III. Blonde-haired, blue-eyed is the height of beauty, they imply; capitalize on it.*

Little girls get things more easily if they are pretty,  
if they do it right. You are good at learning how to do it right.  
Your father likes it when you wear pigtails and don't waste food.  
Your mother likes you in gray with your chore list all checked off.  
Your fourth-grade teacher likes when you wear glasses and  
quietly do the world puzzle on the floor when you  
finish your schoolwork four and a half hours before your classmates.  
Your second piano teacher likes it when he doesn't have to explain  
it twice and he can slip his left arm around your waist  
to play the bottom hand, holding you close to his body.

You learn to read people before you talk to them,  
learn to give them what they want to see. It's fun and challenging;  
it's a game of chess and the better you are, the higher the rewards.  
Their foreheads are smooth; yours is too, because you got it *right*.  
You play like it's a game, but it is not a game, and mistakes are not  
allowed.

*.IV. Mimic with the best of them; twist it around so you appear original.*

No one likes a copy, and you aren't a copy.

You imitate, but you aren't an imitation,

and that's an important difference.

You can't be the best if you're a duplicate.

You're a con artist. A counterfeit.

You like that one.

Counterfeiting takes talent, artistry.

Only the best don't get caught and taken out of circulation.

Eleven-year-old you stands with your father

at the electronics' counter, watching the cashier run

a clear-tipped marker over hundred dollar bills, testing the material.

You determine, then and there, you will pass the test

when a clear-tipped marker gets dragged over what you're made of.

You take inspiration from many places,

scrutinize it,

buff out some edges,

find a place within yourself where it will fit.

You sand it down on the outside,

cover it with sealant.

They see you as a well-formed statue

carved from one piece of wood.

On the inside you are a jigsaw.

You think it is a good thing you enjoy puzzles or you would hate yourself.

.V. *Appearance determines treatment; when they say this is what a woman is, they mean conform, conform, conform.*

You are eight, twelve, fifteen and all the ages in between.

You know that despite what they see

(despite what you *show* them),

you don't quite fit the mold.

Part of that is your fault.

It doesn't bother you.

You want to be the best and

you can't do that by being the same as the crowd at large.

You withstand sneering lips and widened eyes with equal detachment.

You don't mind that you stand out a bit in their minds

because you did that on purpose.

You are ten, thirteen, eighteen and all the ages in between.

You know that despite what they see

(despite what you *show* them),

you don't quite fit the mold.

Part of that is your fault.

It bothers you.

You want to be right and

you can't do that when you make mistakes.

These are parts of you that you do not, cannot, show them,

but sometimes things slip through.

Sometimes things don't slip through and they pick up on it anyway.

You mind when you stand out a bit in their minds

because you didn't do that on purpose.



*.VI. Projecting confidence is key.*

Fifteen is not quite grown.

Chin up, shoulders back, roll hips.

Balance on the balls of your feet to keep  
the seven inch heels from sinking into the grass.

Flash a quick, silver smile at the boys,  
eyes glinting like sea glass.

Laugh like clear bells.

When adults nod in approval,  
pretend you do not notice.

Seventeen is not quite grown.

Nails painted black,  
nose down in a book,  
seven earrings glimmer in always-gleaning ears.

Stride forward,  
boot soles clicking against the pavement.

Send a sharp, subtle smirk at your acquaintances.

Sea glass edges draw blood.

Sarcastic remarks cut like slender knives.

When adults shake their heads,  
pretend you do not notice.

.VII. *Make your face anything you want\**

*\*terms and conditions apply*

*Your skin is strawberries and creme,  
like a porcelain doll, they tell you.*

One thing for which you can take no credit.

You don't even wash your face.

You are just fortunate.

Some tension leaks out of your spine.

(Finally, one thing you can get right  
without plotting, without effort.)

*Big, blue eyes bring them to their knees, sweetheart.*

Baby blues aren't big enough anymore.

Blonde lashes lengthen artificially, coated in black;

kohl makes your eyes seem to take up half your face.

Seventh grade and suddenly

the cerulean alone isn't enough anymore.

Luckily, some eyeshadow colors bring out

azure irises more than others.

(Your eyes are shifting to green, to gray, to yellow;  
you swear they were purple twice.)

*Such lush, cock-sucking lips.*

Pale and pink isn't enough anymore.

Line them in glitter at the beginning,

in rusted blood at the end.

Chapped and scabbed gets odd looks and eye rolls.

You are told to put on Vaseline at least twice a day.

(You suck on them when you're reading and

chew on them at night,  
peeling off layers of skin until you bleed,  
liking the metallic taste on your tongue.)

.VIII. *There is a list of measurements for the perfect body; fulfill them.*

The standard hourglass figure is 36-24-34,  
in Imperial inches.

There must be at least a nine inch difference  
between hips and waist,  
and no more than two inches between bust and hips.  
You are 36-23-36.

Your skin itches.

The measurements don't measure up.

You aren't right.

Maybe if your curves were more defined,  
even better than perfect,  
you'd be at home in these bones.

The corset comes in the mail.

You fucking love that corset.

There is an image of  
*this is a woman* in your head  
and, if you can just match up,  
your blood will stop buzzing in protest.

You are sixteen and in the passenger seat;  
your mother is inside paying for gas;  
a grown man tries to get you to go home with him.  
You are female enough in his eyes.

You are 36-19-36.

Your skin itches.

.IX. *Hair makes a statement; ensure yours reflects what you want to say.*

You had thick, champagne tresses  
that fell to mid-back before you worked up  
the nerve to shear it off.

Many faces read *lesbian*;  
*dyke*, your mother said.

That is bad.

But being a woman pretending to be a man is worse;  
you know that;  
you've been told that since you were five  
and the political talk show your mother likes  
to listen to had a story about a girl  
that became a boy you said  
*that sounds like fun, can I do that?*

You aren't a lesbian.

You keep your hair short.

*.X. Know your flaws, but don't admit to them.*

You are seventeen.

You are aware there is something wrong with you,  
put a name to it in your brain.

You realize you have been lying to yourself your entire life.

You peel strips of skin off with your nails in the shower,  
furious that your body has betrayed you in this way.

Your mother's voice echoes in your skull.

You cannot be the best when your very marrow is flawed.

Water boils over raw flesh and you silently revel in the burn.

You are eighteen.

University applications and tuition paperwork  
cover your desk and your mother teases you  
about your detailed plans.

You do not tell her you strategize  
in the game of life as often as breathing,  
that you don't know how to function in any other way.

You get a full ride and then some.

A fountain of triumph bubbles  
between your defective shoulder blades,  
crisp and tumultuous for six frozen heartbeats  
before your victory settles like soot in your lungs.

You are nineteen.

You disagree with your parents'  
politics on a public platform.

Your mother doesn't speak to you for three months.

You do not tell her you have a list of

approved actions started in toddlerhood you have begun to rip up.  
You do not tell her there's a vanity you built at eleven,  
full of fake faces and puzzle pieces,  
and you are opening the mirror,  
pulling out masks one by one to set on fire.  
You do not tell her that,  
as each one crumbles to ash,  
it burns away skin,  
flaying you open layer by layer.  
She isn't speaking to you,  
so you can't tell her anything at all.

You are twenty.  
You tell your parents the bone-deep truth.  
Your mother spits *deceitful*,  
calls you *liar*.  
You do not tell her  
you learned how to spin falsehood  
as you learned to read,  
a gossamer-thin second skin you pulled on  
every morning with your Princess panties.  
You do not tell her you cannot feel her words  
slice through muscle and sinew,  
that your nerve endings have been seared  
too often to cry out as she sticks you full of holes  
while your father looks on from the head of the table.  
When you leave,  
you will sit on your bed and  
staunch the blood with bed sheets then  
unravel pillowcases so you can stitch the wounds shut.

For now she wields her sword-words,  
while he holds her scabbard,  
and you stand there,  
bleeding and mute.



# Aftermath

## Inheritance

In ways, patriarch and progeny mirror.

Bedrock, thing of centuries and foundations,  
silently enduring.

The world breathes, pressure shifts.

It is enough.

You inherited your father's temper.

You are the wild wind across the barren tundra,  
the arctic blizzard,

the frozen lake, ice cracking underfoot.

Sudden, biting, lethal, over.

Calm and serene once more.

But you lack his rage.

He is the composite volcano,  
a beating heart.

Magma flows, ash in the air.

Sudden, scalding, deadly, lingering.

Lungs struggle to breathe long after lava hardens to stone.

## Island

Your white-petaled mother  
grows, green and yellow,  
calls herself Daffodil.

Bulb planted securely  
in your father's volcanic soil,  
roots digging into the caldera wall.

Your golden-skinned sister  
grins down  
with her blunt teeth.

Moon-child,  
reflecting the narcissus' corona,  
calling to the ocean and freshwater alike.

Your salt-haired baby brother  
taunts the island's mouth,  
splashing sea into magma.

Tide-struck,  
the tsunami, the currents,  
with only sharks for company.

All anticipating the next eruption,  
a pretty poisonous flower  
garners no notice until

you are a shaking, sour-mouthed wreck.  
You are the empty tundra,  
the glaciers, the saxifrage.

Jonquil narcotics pollute your groundwater,  
wither your flora,  
slaughter your wildlife.

Equator islands see no value  
in permafrost, have no place

for icebergs.

The moon smiles,  
the moon sneers,  
the moon turns her face away.

The restless ocean comes  
and goes with the tides,  
ever-welcome.

## Faces Turned Away

*Smack!* rings in your skull.

They keep talking  
as if they haven't just forced  
your face to the left with the weight  
of their words.

Grit your teeth,  
eyes burning,  
make yourself stare them down,  
daring them to strike you again.

They do.  
Of course they do.  
Too exhausted to stop them,  
too obstinate to walk away.

Years pass.  
Your cheeks raw,  
trickling blood.

Stiff fat lip,  
pink saliva drips,  
as you groan,  
*stop, no more.*

But your feet don't move.  
Your neck twists,  
backhanded anew.

Punch back  
with a fistful of  
sentences soaked  
in your own stomach acid.

Sneering lips set,  
they spit at your

ever-planted feet,  
turn their faces away.

They do what you could not.  
Each tap of retreating feet  
breaks capillaries  
behind your eyelids.

Liquid splashes  
on the ground.  
It's just your bloody nose.

You wonder:  
if you let them hit you,  
would they face you again?

## Cosmic Abyss

Inhale.

(Expand.)

Waltz to the ragged barrier

(The Void sings to you,)

of What Is and What Is Not—

(whispers to your lightning)

of What Is You and What Is Not.

(soul,)

You are compacted star dust,

(the collected corpses)

mind loosely moored in your dead-things body,

(of dwarves and giants,)

electric discharge in matter:

(a raw, screaming nerve ending)

the essence of Being,

(of the Universe.)

perpetually Now.

(What Was,)

What is You?

(What Will Be)

Which carcass molecules

(murmurs to synaptic constellations:)

connect to nebulous neurons?

*(Return, beloved,)*

A small clump of atoms

*(here, where What Is)*

in the vast infinity.

*(becomes What Is Not.)*

## Flight

The silence is dense,  
mud up your nose,  
clogging your esophagus.

Their anger rings  
in your eardrums,  
echoing soundlessly—

a pale reincarnation  
of your past.  
Ride in it for miles,

trapped in this roving pen,  
muck cracking your skin,  
crushing pathways in your brain.

Wiggle out a hole  
in the frame.  
Summer sky stretches

above you, offering escape.  
Cross the threshold,  
another cage.

Walls closing in,  
blood bubbles, buzzes,  
*leave this place now!*

Your boots tap,  
one in front  
of the other,

weight on the lateral bones.  
Footfalls muffled.  
*gogogogogo*

Stride straight through  
to the back door.



*outoutoutoutout*

You convince yourself  
they need privacy,  
but really you are running away.

## Cello, Revisited

Bitten nails caress my strings and I hum  
under the callouses. A string is hooked  
into my empty place.  
Rosin meets horsehair,  
fingers rest on the frog,  
I can finally speak.

Grooved fingers guide my melody,  
a bright voice harmonizing  
with my wordless speech.  
When expectations of past  
handling make themselves  
known in a sour, wobbling note,

chipped nails adjust themselves,  
making my solo confident  
and moving. Fingers  
shift to third position, a vibrato  
turns my unaccompanied tune  
into a concerto.

Sound pours forth  
from my body. The old  
perversion of myself  
fading away in the air,  
as rich music serenades boldly  
in ever-widening circles.

## Vaccine

Time for your monthly injection:

*No matter what you do,  
you will never be mistaken for a man.*

The version of your mother  
you had at sixteen  
made a home inside your body  
as a vaccine.

How is your body built?  
The mirror's answer is unrelenting.  
Shattered glass would clink like rain,  
but it's not the mirror's fault.  
It's yours, so you fracture your brain instead.

Your skin is thick,  
but she is inside your arteries,  
diluting the iron in your blood,  
keeping you gasping for air.

She seeps, insidious, through your veins,  
half a decade later, too familiar  
to be attacked from the inside  
as infections ought to be.

She is a poison now,  
tearing your mind apart.  
There is no antidote.

Frozen

They fight,  
voices brassy and strident,  
a shadow of your parents,  
enough to spook you.

You do not flinch.  
Icicle.  
Rime-frosted glacier.

Underneath:  
meltwater rushes  
through your veins.

Static electricity of  
an adrenaline strike,  
prickling up your biceps,  
crawling down your thighs.

*leavestayspeakhideleavestayspeakhide*  
Brain misfiring, you  
cannot think.

Rabbit heart goes  
*thumpthumpthump*  
in its cage.  
Stay still, little prey.

Eyes on wrists, on empty space,  
watching nothing:  
a mummer's farce.  
Slip beneath their scope.

Ears twitching,  
track their bodies,  
track their moods,  
ready to bolt.

*staystilldontmovehide*

Inhale air. Nose,  
throat, lungs, stomach.  
Attempt to slow  
your racing pulse.

You want to disappear,  
to evaporate.  
But human bodies  
don't work like that.  
You cannot move.

## Fear

*Where is your fear, boy?*

Blue flames scorching your star white skull?

Howling wind eroding your limestone stomach?

Melting ice in your sugar lungs?

Where are your wet clay ankles?

The soot in your sclera?

Your dry twig fingers and glass shoulders?

Where is the suzuran on your tongue?

You signed a decree for your doom,

sent it to all corners

of the kingdom.

*Where is your fear, boy?*

Iron knife in your mouth

clinks against pestle teeth,

scoring marble skin.

Cold, coal bones and

drift glass eyes.

Rain tears have no use here.

Dead water from ocean deserts

replaces magnetic blood

in your aqueduct heart.

Tundra snow freezes

striated muscle,

a living statue.

The yawning void grins,

rabid, at the edges

of your lightning storm

mind, eating

light and sound,

leaving

only calm, chaotic darkness  
stretching in all directions. Dead  
sun corpses grasp silk strong nerves,

heavy, dragging you down.

*Become us, beloved.*

*Where is your fear, boy?*

## Weaver

Loom threaded with familial yarn:  
lava red, ocean blue, moon yellow,  
daffodil white veined with mold.

For finger-numbing hours, you weave  
connections to your family,  
a blanket to warm you.

The white skein's rot creeps  
through the tapestry, degrading  
the foundation of the craft.

Strings fall apart  
faster than you  
can move the shuttle.

Magma red contracts black decay;  
it is rough scoria and sharp obsidian  
against your fingertips.

The cloth tangles,  
snarls in on itself.  
Too many fibers damaged beyond repair.

Your hands leave bloody prints,  
a darker shade of ruin  
against once-bright colors.

Yellows: pale, moon, bright,  
sunshine, savannah, banana yellows.  
Vibrant, delicate shades putrefy

to an eye-watering green.  
The smile slips further off your face  
with each new row of weft.

The longer you stare,



the more hideous it becomes.  
It reeks.

Decomposition stench  
crinkles your nose,  
curls your lips.

Island blue, the last unblemished color,  
catches your eye amid  
the wreckage of your work.

The fabric does not fulfill its purpose,  
will never warm you now,  
even if you weave your digits raw.

Toss it in the hearth, light a match,  
savouring the fire's glow  
while crocheting an ocean blue scarf instead.

## Fall Incense

You and your sister  
burn the final strands  
of thread between you.

She claims to love you  
as you are.  
She has a different idea—  
a steel-hardened bubble—  
of you.

The person she wants—  
the sister she clings to—  
does not exist.

There is only you,  
and you are not enough.

Shirtless on your bed,  
apple cinnamon incense  
in the air, from halfway  
across the country,  
you both light your string on fire.

Your face is a plaster mask,  
breathing steady—  
a mountain lake,  
rippleless.

Next to you, sky blue eyes,  
jeweler with a microscope,  
scrutinize your expression,  
drag over your body.

Your pulse betrays you,  
a bass line thumping heavily.  
She can see it jumping  
in your carotid,  
jerking in your diaphragm.

Her concern creases  
between her brows,  
pulls her mouth down  
at the corners.

You stare at her blankly.

Holiday Gift

Leaves changing in your landlocked state,  
harvesting corn, sowing winter wheat.

Hurricane season.

You sing your father a song  
he does not want to hear.

*This would be a hard one to swallow:*

He covers his ears,  
opens his mouth.

*you just have to get over it.*

Frozen marrow,  
embers in sea glass

*History is history*

steam away fluid  
before it puddles.

*It doesn't change*

He doesn't outright brand  
you liar.

*It usually gets more exaggerated*

He declares love for you,  
doesn't want

*something bad for you, only good*

He turns away  
from your evidence.

You do not hear from him again.

Naked trees, limbs bare  
to crisp air under snowy skies.

Families gather, shops laden.

Surprise!  
A holiday gift!

Father no longer ensures your health.

Lips a pale, pink line.  
It's not the first time.

Back exposed 36 days, unwarned.

Deep, silent breath:  
nose, throat, lungs, stomach.

Unwilling to tell you to your face.

You waited, still,  
for words that never came.

His long-decaying pedestal collapses.

For the first time,  
you think of him:

*Coward.*

## Sorrow Slow Dances

Sorrow dances through his head,  
light steps and elegant twirls.  
Feet touching the bone-deep injury,  
drawing him up from his knees,  
out of his wound.

It takes his hand, waist,  
they spin furiously along the ragged edges.  
The laceration begins to close.  
The ferocity of their movements lessens  
until they are slow dancing over a scar.

No blood, no vulnerable insides  
on display—  
Just a strip of white  
in his mind where Sorrow sways  
with him a moment longer before disappearing.

## Wheat Field

Flat plains  
of your chest,  
covered in wheat-  
flaxen hair, thick,  
capturing sunshine.

Rose-white scars scything  
from under pectorals,  
rivers nourishing  
the land.

Rolling hills  
of your breasts  
eroded,  
mounded remnants  
scraped away,  
leveled for farmland.

They were unfruitful,  
made the soil  
of your body  
desolate  
—barren  
of growing things.

Compacted clay bricks  
fired to your torso,  
curving your tree trunk spine,

warping your bough shoulders.

You don't miss them.